Post-Punk in Concert
The Tijuana Digital Art Circuit

Paola Virginia Suárez Ávila*

We were living in phony progress: the city in full movement,
the number-one song, a multitude of cars, and the most beautiful stores.
That was before; now unemployment coldly and cynically condemns us to poverty;
but people are people. On the Internet I saw that
the collective karmas do aerobics in Central Park;
I don't stop crying. Can you hear me?
Somebody is holding up a placard that reads,
"Free Charles Manson" in red letters. Punk never died, my surfing brother.

Rafa Saavedra[1]

Tijuana's contemporary art movement is of great interest worldwide because it has managed to create a border and transnational identity that has been reproduced in visual art, film, and literary works merging new artistic technologies with traditional techniques in a cultural production process unique in Mexico.

This article's analysis is guided by the rebirth of cultural life in this border city, and, in particular, centers on the study of digital works in which contemporary local artists have sought to interpret the daily life and visual culture of their city and the Tijuana-San Diego trans-border region.

The emergence of a new circuit of local art between the cities of Tijuana and San Diego has influenced the region's cultural development, contributing an aesthetic that analyzes the importance of the human, technological, and socio-political relations between Mexico and the

* Post-doctoral fellow at CISAN and Professor at the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters.
caraxola@gmail.com.
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United States. In this sense, the development of technology-based art has been a key point in Tijuana: since the mid-1990s, artistic endeavors have grown with the development of new communications platforms and the expansion of artistic disciplines such as multi-media art and electronic music, creating a new aesthetic of the Mexico-U.S. border.

Tijuana, Mexico's New Mecca For Digital Art

This new circuit of digital and visual art from the Tijuana-San Diego trans-border area has surpassed the typical mechanisms for creating art nationwide, formerly fostered by Mexico's governmental institutions and cultural centers, creating an independent proposal with local development linked to the impetus of globalization and the socio-political projects along the border. This new circuit is part of a worldwide process linked to the digital revolution of the 1990s, including the surge in Internet technology and access to media, and the expansion of the digital social networks among a large part of the young, university, urban population throughout the world.

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The new spaces for communication generated in the first years of the digital revolution have made the appearance of new non-state cultural actors possible, such as visual artists, agents, cultural promoters, and independent writers in Tijuana. They have joined forces to collaborate to achieve an important degree of cultural development. Over the last 20 years, all this has created the new independent art circuit in which self-organized projects are promoted and resources sought out circumventing the public cultural policies designed from Mexico's capital, which historically have shown no interest in art from the border, and therefore, included no mechanisms to benefit artists from the region.

Thus, the global digital revolution has facilitated the generation of new communications mechanisms that have been marginal in government-sponsored artistic-cultural production. In the case of Tijuana, the beginning of the technological revolution has allowed for broadening audiences locally and globally, and for creating specialized circuits of border art, promoting and generating new aesthetic discourses that



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seek recognition locally, but also have the aim of connecting with artistic circuits with greater global impact, such as the ones in U.S. cities like San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.

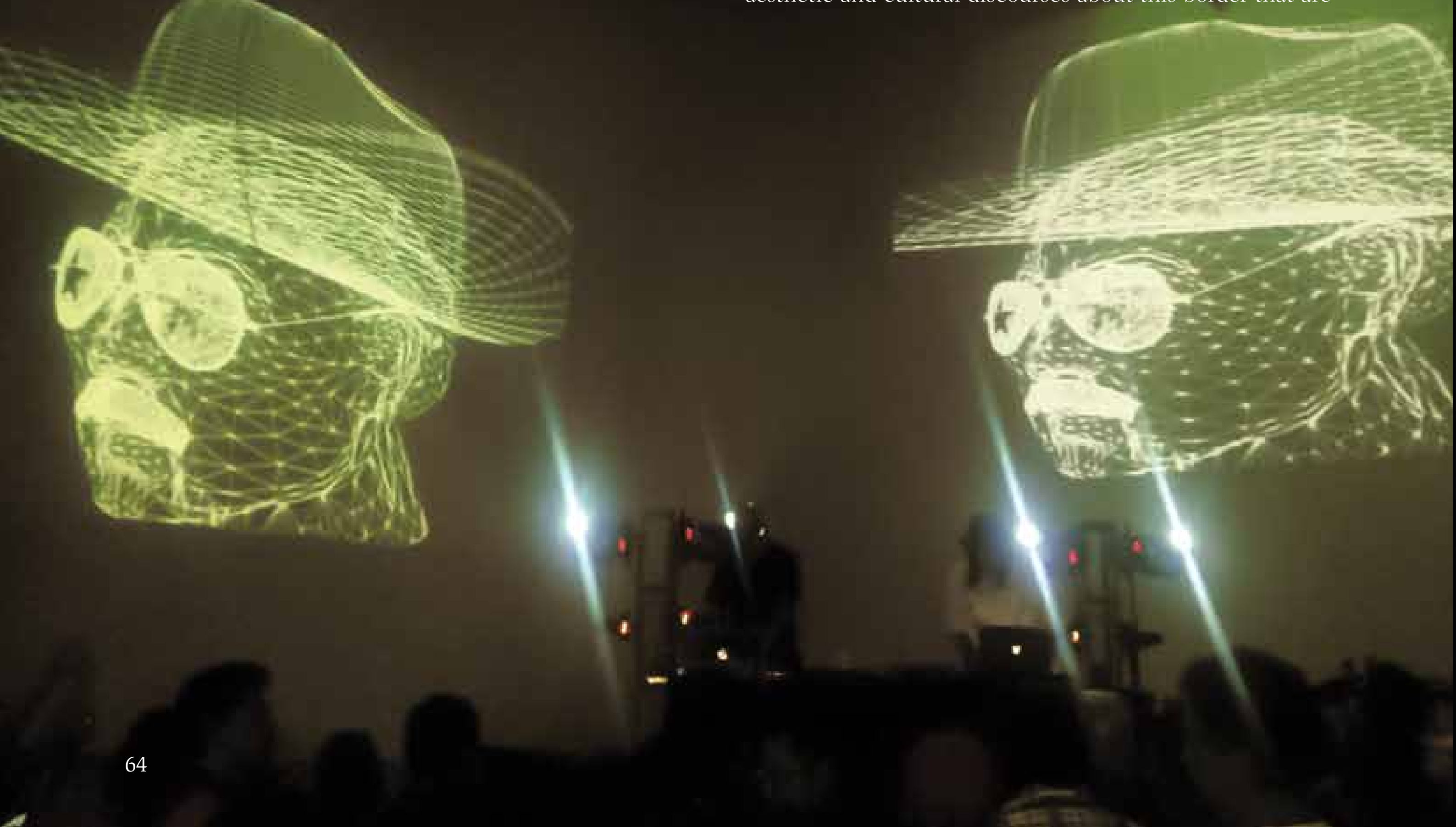
The region's new digital art has made possible the formulation and promotion of new creative processes. Since they focus on daily life on the border, on the discussions about what the border is, and on how it is experienced māinly by young people, they acquire an exclusive, specific character. To do that, using electronic storage, distribution, and promotional sites like the Internet portals YouTube, Vimeo, Behance, among others, has been fundamental. Virtual communities for cinema, visual art, electronic music, and literature have also been generated on Blogspots, Twitter and Facebook groups, and Instagram.

In this case, the digital revolution is expressed in cultural practices that combine modern with traditional praxes; the cultural change that inspires young people to create digital and/or multi-media art takes advantage of virtual and real spaces for developing a new aesthetic around specific border themes as a space of identity convergence and divergence and human and material movement as part of daily life.

The changes in traditional practices in the production, distribution, and consumption of visual art and independent literature in the region show how access to technology has allowed Tijuana to put itself on the map of the world's cultural cities without the need to ask for sponsorship from Mexican or U.S. cultural institutions to promote it.

Néstor García Canclini has stated that the transformations generated by a new economy and technological innovations have created economic frameworks specific to the digital era, in which the creative economy, artistic communities, and the new cultural practices are seen as a resource for the local economies that are part of the global market.[2]

On that basis, the generation of new artistic circuits that promote the cultural and artistic production in border regions, together with the creation of virtual communities, can be recognized as a political-cultural project that has taken root in the most recent globalization. The characteristics of this project in Tijuana speak to the ability to independently produce culture and visual art in the region linked to a cultural history of its own that sets Mexico's border region apart as a marginal space in the social and cultural sphere. In addition, the generation of these circuits makes possible the appearance of aesthetic and cultural discourses about this border that are



diverse and different from those already espoused by the nation-states through their own cultural institutions.

In that sense, promoting the region's cultural circuit permits the fostering of an identity specific to the people who live and transit through the border, as well as the creation of an artistic community that discusses and generates its development through art. New independent cultural actors promote the creation of new cultural circuits in virtual and non-virtual spaces and with local and global communities that are discussing similar themes and aesthetics. In both cases, young people are key actors in developing digital communications platforms and circuits.

Guiomar Salvat Martinrey and Vicente Serrano Marín mention that the new communications spaces created with the digital revolution establish new spaces for culture, and even a new culture "that makes visible the emergence of a new way of understanding relations with the world and other human beings based on technology that determines an artificial space to replace the dominant beliefs about nature, what is human, knowledge, and political and social relations."[3]

From that perspective, digital art, inscribed in a new culture, makes it evident that the digital world lets us enter into the creation of a new language in which traditional genres of art are weakened and new identities, as transmutable and ephemeral as art itself, are generated, making it manifest that if the subject is changing in this time, so is art. Equally, a new frontier appears between what used to be catalogued as "High Culture" and "popular culture," making it difficult to discern what is produced within the traditional structures of national art and what is produced in the sphere of popular art. New communication exists within artistic production to undermine the hierarchical structures of art traced in the past by the nation-state and its cultural institutions.[4]

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To know how these relationships are expressed in digital art and in Tijuana's artistic circuit, we will take into consideration that the border region's cultural community has an enormous incentive to communicate using technology with other border and non-border communities to create a wider circuit of distribution and production of culture about and from the border. The border community that fosters it and the government and non-governmental cultural actors (institutions, collectives, groups, and artists) that develop it face new communications phenomena inside the region to find out which processes conceived of and reproduced in art are those that should be discussed within the theme of the border.[5]

The generations of young people who have nourished border art in Tijuana use it to socialize their knowledge, their vision of the world, and their identity *vis*-à-vis the changing phenomenon of the border's cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions. From an anthropological point of view, the sociability of young people in the digital era explains the transformation of their experience and that of their community with technology, replacing the vision in which technology absorbs all cultural phenomena, recognizing that it is young people in digital practice who transform cultural practices and the dynamics of human communication.



The Young Artists of The Tijuana-San Diego Border

The young creators and artists of the Tijuana-San Diego border are social and cultural actors who have bet on a project of digital communication in a process of economic production strengthened by local and global digital networks. The expansion of the action and communications by young creators in the region has transformed the space around Tijuana into a key city for understanding technological relations in the socio-cultural sphere. Thus, the expression of young artists in Tijuana constitutes a space in which they study and find their own aesthetic to express the way in which they make technological knowledge their own and bring it to the production of works of art and digital culture in their global surroundings, giving this border region its own characteristics.

The discussion about the border among Tijuana's artists since the 1990s has maintained tension with the cultural and artistic proposals emerging from Mexico City and Chicano art. As a reference for multi-media art, in the 1980s, the border artists found in the production of visual art an autonomous space for dialogue to understand and reflect from the point of view of art about everything related to the cultural and socio-historical condition of the Mexico-U.S. border. When a group of artists, activists, and cultural promoters from the Tijuana-San Diego area created the Taller de Arte Fronterizo/Border Art Workshop in 1983, they managed to situate "the border" as a central place for the production of works with a non-traditional format, known as performance art.

The change in the border region, seen as peripheral until the mid-1990s, generated new discussions with the opening of Mexico under the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, which once again discussed what a border was and what it was good for. The community itself fostered cultural self-organization projects to make up for the lack of artistic means of production, the dearth of local cultural industries, and the design of cultural policies that had not helped in previous years to encourage local art.

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Technology was the key point for building a new ideology in the border area with the appearance of musical and visual arts collectives like Nortec and Torolab, whose characteristic trademark was the relationship of northern Mexico with the cutting-edge technology developing in California. Prolific writers also appeared on the scene like Heriberto Yépez and Rafa Saavedra, who fostered new forms of writing based on new narratives combining Spanish with English and using the blogspot as a technological platform. These narratives transformed reading and created new challenges for the artistic community in the region in terms of its production.

New Artistic Circuits Emerge on the Border

In conclusion, the emergence of new artistic circuits in the region to promote border cultural and artis-



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tic production has been an immensely political cultural project. Guiding it have been the capacity for independent production of culture and visual art in a border region with regard to its own cultural history and the generation of political-cultural discourses about the Mexico-U.S. and other borders. These discourses promote a particular vision of the cultural reason for being of the borders in the era of globalization. In addition to these two guidelines, I would add the promotion of an identity of its own for the border region constructed and deconstructed based on the artistic discourses in which young people have been the key actors for their discussion, using digital communication platforms and circuits on a local and global level.

As a result of this local digital art project, both a tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the region has been created that helps transmit knowledge, identity, and memory of the border society, as well as a cultural circuit that makes it possible for new independent cultural actors to promote contemporary visions of digital art with regard to national and international institutional projects like those of the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). VM

Notes

[1] Rafa Saavedra, "Fuck your Dreams," *Esto no es una salida. Postcards de ocio y odio*, Punto de Quiebre Collection (Mexico City: Nitro Press, 2012), p. 7.

[2] Néstor García Canclini, "Introducción," Néstor García Canclini, Francisco Cruces, and Maritza Urteaga Castro Pozo, comps., *Jóvenes, culturas urbanas y redes digitales* (Madrid and Barcelona: Fundación Telefónica and Ariel, 2012), p.4.

[3] Guiomar Salvat Martinrey and Vicente Serrano Marín, *La revolución digital y la sociedad de la información* (Seville: Comunicación Social. Ediciones y publicaciones, 2011), p. 142.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The concept of border along the border space contains a great many connotations in the cultural and historic spheres. The border has stopped being just a political line drawn by the 1848 Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty and has become a social space where different populations of Mexico and the United States have historically interacted.

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